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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the past assumptions about the mismatch of child language and school language, noting the distance principle, the characteristics of language interference and the various treatments that have been hypothesized. Past research involving language mismatch and reading is reviewed, and it is noted that even though the best evidence against mismatch involves phonological mismatch, it elegantly refutes a thesis held by nobody. Grammatical mismatch research is flawed where completed but often hampered by an unwillingness of the public to accept dialect in print. The major thrust of the paper is to suggest that recent developments in linguistic theory and research have opened the area of language functions for investigation. Functional language competence is asserted to be much more crucial to reading, particularly as it relates to teacher education, curriculum, materials and cross cultural understandings. Finally, it is urged that investigations be undertaken in the mismatch of child language and learning styles. (Author)

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The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language:

Implications for Beginning Reading Instruction

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April 1, 1976
Conference on Beginning Reading Instruction
University of Pittsburgh

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ABSTRACT

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This paper describes the past assumptions about the mismatch of child language and school language, noting the distance principle, the characteristics of language interference and the various treatments that have been hypothesized.

Next, past research involving language mismatch and reading is reviewed and it is noted that even though the best evidence against mismatch involves phonological mismatch, it elegantly refutes a thesis held by nobody. Grammatical mismatch research is flawed where completed but often hampered by an unwillingness of the public to accept dialect in print.

The major thrust of the paper is to suggest that recent developments in linguistic theory and research have opened the area of language functions for investigation. Functional language competence is asserted to be of much more cruciality to reading, particularly as it relates to teacher education, curriculum, materials and cross cultural understandings.

Finally, it was urged that investigations be undertaken in the mismatch of child language and learning styles.

The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language: Implications for Beginning Reading Instruction

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The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language:

Implications for Beginning Reading Instruction

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The emotional heat generated by the discussion of the relationship of vernacular English to spoken English in the reading process has been spectacular, if not enlightening. What was originally postulated as a reasonable hypothesis for serious analysis quickly became a political football which prevented the very investigation which it suggested. The idea was simple enough. Learning theory seems to indicate that people tend to learn what they do not know on the basis of what they do know. That is, we learn new things by building on the common ground of already existing knowledge.

Anthropologists have, for years, espoused this principle of common ground when establishing a cross-cultural relationship. They find similarities between cultures and use these to build future understandings and relationships.

Good children's literature also seems to support this principle, at least in practice if not in recognized theoretical stance. A good child's poem begins from the child's point of view, not from the adult's. Laura Richards' poem about rain with the lines, "Pitter, patter falls the rain, gently plashing on my window pane," belies the adult perspective. Dorothy Aldis' rain poem, on the other hand, seems to be written from the common ground perspective of the child: "The rain is washing all the worms pink and beautiful.

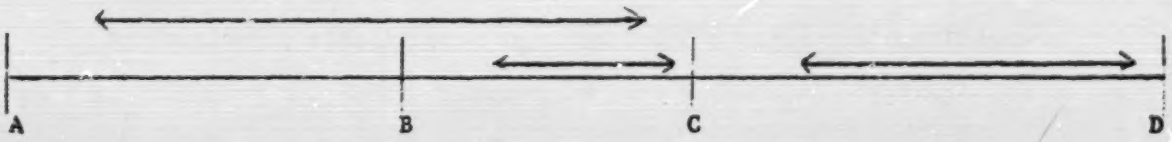
1.0 Past Assumptions About the Mismatch of Child Language and School Language

Some linguists and educators advocated that the language beginning point of the child who habitually speaks a vernacular version of language might be worth examining as the potential cause for reading failure. In the late sixties, several articles appeared, based on their author's unwillingness to believe that these children were not learning to read well (or at all) as a result of some sort of genetic handicap or in some random or accidental distribution.

1.1 Distance

The principle of language mismatch can be illustrated, quite simply, as follows:

Vernacular Spoken Language	Main-stream Spoken Language	Common Written Language	Written Language Used in Beginning Reading Instruction



Critical Measurement Points

1. Phonology
2. Grammar
3. Functions

Figure 1

The graphic portrayal of the distance between various aspects of language use is, of course, more schematic than scientific. It suggests, without scientific quantitative research backing it up, that the sort of written language used in everyday life (C) is measurably different from the spoken language used even by the main-stream population (B), that this written language is even more different between vernaculars (A) of a given speech community (degrees of difference between vernaculars might also be noted), and that the common written language (C) is also different, in the opposite direction, from the sort of written language frequently used for the instruction of beginning readers (D). Those who believe that there is some validity to the suggestion of this figure hypothesized that all children have some interference between spoken language and the written materials which they are required to read but that those children whose vernacular spoken language is different from the mainstream spoken language will probably have even more difficulty.

1.2 Interference

The interference of one language system upon another is not a new concept in linguistics. Foreign accents are well known examples of this. In such cases the phonology of the mother tongue is used for both languages, modified only slightly if at all. Likewise, the grammatical patterns of one language system may intrude upon another system. (This modification of one system on the model of another is referred to as interference). Interference may be noted in the production of language, whether written or spoken, but also in the reception of language. In producing language, interference tends to result

from the differences between the language systems. In receiving language, interference may also result from the similarities between the language systems. An educated American will need to be able to hear and understand a number of varieties of American, British and foreign accented English (although there is considerably less need to learn to speak them all). Likewise such receptivity should be developed for a number of varieites of literary English: formal, informal, older versions and slang (although there is considerably less need to learn to compose in all of them).

1.3 Treatment Hypotheses

On the assumption that differences between the child's spoken language and his literacy materials were at least partially responsible for the fact that so many poor readers are found among speakers of various vernacular versions of English, several research directions have been projected. At least five such hypotheses have been posited as approaches for reducing the mismatch between the Vernacular Black English used by some beginning readers and the middle class language in which their initial reading materials are written.[1]

1. Teach children to speak Standard English, then teach them to read it.
2. Teach teachers about Vernacular Black English so that they will not confuse its use with real reading problems.
3. Develop beginning materials in Vernacular Black English.
4. Develop beginning reading materials which systematically avoid the mismatch of Vernacular Black English to Standard English written materials.

[1] See R. Shuy. "Speech Differences and Teaching Strategies: How Different is Enough?" in R. Hodges and E. Rudorf (eds) Language and Learning to Read: What Teachers Need to Know About Language. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972.

5. Make use of the Language Experience Approach.

To date, there has been little research to support, without qualification and question, any one of these approaches individually. Research has been hampered by inordinate negative public reaction to any attempts to implement number 3. Number 1, the standard, historical approach, has never been proved to be supportable. Some progress is being made on number 2 but the road has been, and will continue to be, slow and rocky. Number 4 has been implemented in only the most indirect fashion to date. Number 5 has been restricted by the average teacher's difficulty in writing down exactly what a child says rather than what she thinks he says or what she might wish he had said, although more recent progress has helped neutralize these problems.

Regardless of the apparent inconclusiveness of the above hypotheses, the study of vernacular English has contributed certain benefits to the field of reading. The call of linguists for more realistic and believable language in beginning reading materials has helped remove some of the stilted language of past primers, bringing stage D of Figure 1 a bit closer to Stage C. The focus of those who study vernacular English or syntax and the importance of processing whole language units rather than mere letter-sound correspondences has helped modify somewhat current reading instruction along those lines. The linguist's contention that surface-structure oral reading does not necessarily reflect deep-structure comprehension is helping to play down supposed misreadings such as She go for She goes by speakers of Vernacular Black English. Some progress is being made in helping teachers learn that learning to read and learning to speak Standard English are not the same thing and that an attempt to teach and evaluate both at the same time is a confusion of tasks for the teacher and child alike.

2.0 Past Research in Language Mismatch in Reading

This is not to say that research on the question of language interference has been lacking. Unfortunately, much of this research has been misdirected, flawed or based on the assumption that a methodology is the proper focus of examination. Some of these problems in research grow naturally out of the assumptions of the field of reading but are generally unsupported by linguists.

2.1 Phonological Mismatch

It has been generally assumed in the field of reading, for example, that phonology plays a tremendously important role in early reading. It was only natural, then, that someone would study the potential interference of vernacular English on learning to read. Melmed's comparison of third grade Black and White children's ability to discriminate auditorily, to understand and to read aloud in content utilizing the major diagnostic phonological features of vernacular Black English is a case in point.[2] In a carefully worked out procedure, Melmed concluded that while the Black subjects contrasted to the Whites in auditory discrimination and production of these diagnostic pronunciations, they comprehended them equally well in both oral and silent reading. This research then, rejects the hypothesis that phonological interference affects learning to read. As Simons points out, Melmed's study is flawed in several ways,[3] but particularly interested to the linguist is the fact that phonological interference was even suggested. To the linguist, the English spelling system is complicated but

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2. Jay Paul Melmed. Black English Phonology: The Question of Reading Interference. Monographs of the Language - Behavior Research Laboratory. No. 1. University of California, Berkeley, 1971.

3 Herbert D. Simons, "Black Dialect and Reading Interference: A Review and Analysis of the Research Evidence," University of California, mimeo, n.d.

highly regular. In an article which appeared at least two years before Melmed's research, I analyzed the potential phonological interference between vernacular Black English and main-stream usage and concluded:

> A careful description of the phonology of Black English speakers will be of more use to teachers than to writers of classroom materials. The arbitrariness of the symbolization process makes it rather unnecessary to recast primers into a graphemic series which deletes the r in car (cah), the l in help (hep), which substitute voiceless stops for voiced ones in words like red (ret), and which show consonant - cluster reductions in words like just (jus), and send (sen). Urban disadvantaged Negroes should not find it difficult to discover that (j s) is realized in print as just. Their grapheme rule would be st - /s/ in final position. This is certainly no more unreasonable than other double grapheme relations as single sounds, such as th - /0/ in thin or mb - /m/ in thumb.[4]

The major thrust of the work linguists who pursued the question of the mismatch of spoken language and beginning reading was to focus on grammatical, not phonological interference. Melmed's research, as well as that of Rystrom,[5] Rentel and Kennedy,[6] and Osterberg[7] tend to be elaborate rejections of positions never held, at least not by linguists.

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[4] Roger W. Shuy, "A Linguistic Background for Developing Beginning Reading Materials for Black Children" in Joan Baratz and Roger Shuy (eds) Teaching Black Children to Read. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1968, p. 123.

[5] Richard Rystrom, "Dialect Training and Reading: A Further Look," Reading Research Quarterly V (Summer, 1970), pp. 581-599.

[6] Victor Rentel and J. Kennedy, "Effects of Pattern Drill on the Phonology, Syntax and Reading Achievement of Rural Appalachian Children." American Educational Research Journal, 9 (1972), pp. 87 - 100.

[7] T. Osterberg, Bilingualism and the First School Language. Umea, Sweden, Vastenbottens Togckeri AB, 1961.

2.2 Grammatical Mismatch

That some of the research on dialect interference in reading is flawed has been pointed out by Simons[8] and by Venezky.[9] The usual educational research flaws of sample size and comparability are shared by the study of Schaaf[10] and Sims,"[11] neither of whom had an adequate number of subjects nor comparable reading materials across dialects. Both studies focused on grammatical interference rather than phonological but problems arose when decisions had to be made regarding the adequacy of the language representation in the text. Sociolinguists have been careful to point out that dialect variation is more a continuum than a polarity and that speakers of one dialect may differ from those of another dialect in such minute matters as the frequency of occurrence of a particular feature more than in its categorical presence or absence.

It is very clear, for example, that copula deletion is a characteristic of Vernacular Black English as it is spoken in New York, Washington, D.C., and Detroit. Certain linguists violently object to this idea, noting that Southern Whites also say "he here" or "you gonna do it". And, of course, they are quite correct. What they fail to see, however, is that those who posit copula deletion as a characteristic of Vernacular Black English are not comparing Southern Whites to Northern Blacks but are, quite the contrary, concerned about what is considered Vernacular Black English in those specific Northern contexts. But even there, we find that speakers of that dialect do not delete every copula.

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[8] Simons, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

[9] Richard L. Venezky, "Non-standard Language and Reading," Working Paper No. 43, Wisc. Research & Development Center for Cognitive Learning, Madison, Wisc. 1970, 12.

[10] E. Schaaf. "A Study of Black English Syntax and Reading Comprehension" Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1971.

[11] Rudine Sims, "A Psycholinguistic Description of Miscues Created by Selected Young Readers During Oral Reading of Text in Black Dialect and Standard English. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1972.

Infact, the frequency of occurrence of that deletion stratifies quite nicely according to socio-economic status. Likewise, not every standard English speaker produces a copula every time it might be expected in his speech, although the frequency of occurrence is probably very high. An even clearer case is that of multiple negation which is also said to characterize Vernacular Black English, even though it is quite clear that many whites also use the form regularly. What, then, can it mean to call it Vernacular Black English? Simply that it is consistently found to occur in the continuous, natural speech of Blacks at a much higher frequency than it occurs in the speech of Whites from the same communities and of the same socio-economic status. Strangely enough, this sort of finding is still rather new in linguistics and, to some linguists, quite heretical.

The upshot of this sort of realization has been felt by research of the sort required to compare the effects of dialect on reading ability. If one were to construct a comparable set of materials in vernacular English and mainstream English, just exactly how would this variability be represented? Likewise, if we are to select dialect speakers for experimentation or analysis, exactly what are the criteria for determining whether or not they are accurately selected or speakers of the dialect in question? Does one occurrence of the diagnostic feature qualify them? Must we elicit a hundred tokens of potential multiple negatives in order to find the 73.6% frequency of occurrence for lower working class Blacks and 56.3% for lower working class Whites, as the Detroit research indicates?[12] Johnson and Simons developed presumably equivalent stories

[12] R. Shuy, W. Wolfram and W.K. Riley, Field Techniques in an Urban Language Study, Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1967. p.88

for vernacular and mainstream dialects and presented them to third grade Black children.[13] No differences were discovered in comprehension, recall or reading errors, offering no-support to the grammatical interference hypothesis. Considerable question remains, however, about the extent to which the 57 subjects were speakers of the dialect under consideration, largely because the minute linguistic analysis required of each subject was not done. Being Black or being lower class (usually judged by correlational evidence of housing patterns) are usually assumed to imply speaking vernacular. Sociolinguists shudder at such assumptions.

2.3 Dialect Reading Materials

Efforts to develop beginning reading materials in vernacular English in order to avoid the mismatch of spoken language to the printed page have been spectacular but less than successful.

Based on the principle that "learning is facilitated in direct proportion to the extent that the subject matter is relevant to the experiental background of the learner", the Chicago Board of Education created its Psycholinguistics Reading Series - A Bi-Dialectal Approach in 1965.[14] Since many urban children speak a dialect of English which varies from the Standard English spoken in the schools, the program is aimed at avoiding the usual problems faced by these students when learning to read. Instead of attempting to introduce a new pattern of speech at the same time as the introduction of reading, the program builds upon the language the child brings to the classroom.

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[13] K.R. Johnson and H.D. Simons, Black Children's Reading of Dialect and Standard Text. Final Report, Project No. OEC-9-72-011(057), USOE, 1973.

[14] L. Leaverton, M. Gladny, O. Davis, The Psycholinguistics Reading Program - A Bidialectal Approach, Chicago: Board of Education, 1969.

The authors wanted to discover what effect using the child's actual word pattern and grammatical structures would have on the quality of learning in the beginning reading situation. They were also interested in to what extent using the child's dialect would help him in mastering the same material written in the Standard English form.

The book itself consists of eight units with each story presented in both the child's dialect (Everyday Talk) and Standard English (School Talk). The terms in parentheses are used in order to avoid placing value judgments which might be psychologically damaging to the child.

Leaverton, one of the authors of the series, discusses the program in an article in Language Differences: Do They Interfere?[15] After describing the theory behind the program, Leaverton explains his study, designed to see how successful the program was. There were two groups of students matched on the basis of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, and on sex. One group, the Control group, was given the School Talk version of the story first. When the teacher decided that half of the Experimental group was given the Everyday Talk story, both groups were given word and phrase recognition tests. These tests were designed to answer the question, "Will the children learn to read the Everyday Talk stories quicker than the School Talk stories?" Then, when the teacher though half of the experimental group was able to read the School Talk story orally without mistakes, both groups were given word and phrase recognition tests. These tests were designed to test the question, "Will learning to read the Everyday Talk story facilitate the learning of the School Talk sotry?". The word and phrase recognition tests consisted of oral review

[15] Lloyd Leaverton, "Dialectal Readers: Rationale, Use and Value," in J. Laffey and R. Shuy, Language Differences: Do They Interfere? Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1973.

tests and retention tests. The oral review tests, given after each unit, used the same vocabulary as the unit although the order was rearranged to alter the content and meaning of the story. The two groups were compared on total mean errors, errors on verb forms only, and time required to read the story. About four to six months after both groups had completed a unit, word recognition and oral review tests were given to measure retention of material. After analyzing the data, Leaverton came to the conclusion that there was a definite trend in favor of the experimental group. The program seemed to be especially successful with boys who scored in the lowest quartile on the reading readiness test given at the beginning of the first grade. Leaverton states that the most significant value of the program". . . lies in the influence it has had on the attitude and behavior of the teacher toward the children's oral speech", since the teacher at no time is to criticize the speech of the children but, rather, is to encourage the child to learn to handle both dialects systematically.

From a linguistic viewpoint, the dialect readers produced by this program suffer from a flaw similar to that of materials developed in the International Teaching Alphabet. One basic claim of I.T.A. is that it reduces the mismatch of sound to spelling by increasing the number of sound symbols and adding presumed consistency to the spelling system. In reality, I.T.A. comes no closer to representing the speech of individuals than does the regular alphabet. Printed I.T.A. texts are in a regularized standard dialect which does not permit regional, social or individual variation thus, by definition, failing to reduce mismatch of spoken to written language. The Chicago dialect readers have also standardized the representation of spoken language, this time by

grammatical units rather than by spelling. In the Everyday Talk versions for example, past tenses are categoricall realized as zero whereas, in reality, such realization is variable. Such variation may or may not need to be represented in the text, but this project and these readers have never shown whether or not it needs to be represented, for the issue of frequency of occurrence was never addressed.

Another celebrated dialect reader project, conducted by Joan Baratz and William Stewart, suffered from serious public relations problems growing out of a number of factors, not the least of which was the unwillingness of the public (parent-consumers) to approve of seeing the vernacular in print. There is a mystique about the printed page which argues against any form of representation other than the accepted code. All else is categorized along with the comic strips and pulp sensationalism. Public reaction to the Baratz and Stewart dialect readers was so intense that their research project was seriously thwarted. The materials produced by this project were closer approximations of actual vernacular dialect than were the Chicago materials, although the variability issue was no better addressed. The emotional outburst concerning the suggestion that vernacular reading materials should be tested has fairly well inhibited any further investigation in this area. This issue is not one which can be researched without real experimentation with real children. Despite what educators have been saying for decades about the need for "starting with children where they are," the matter of starting with a child's language where it is has never been accepted. This paradox has had more recent visibility in the bilingual education issue, which argues from essentially the same

premise, that cognitive growth, learning to read and self-esteem will be significantly furthered if the child is taught first in his mother tongue. Just as in the bidialectal situation, the advocates of bilingualism argue that the non-native child should learn the main-stream language (English) but that the mother tongue need not be erradicated in the process, that it need not be demeaned, that it can be used as an effective medium of instruction, particularly at the onset of education. Somehow the notion of bilingualism has received more public support than bidialectalism, despite the similarity of their claims and promises.

2.4 Results of the Treatment and Research

Perhaps it is time to step back and assess exactly what has been accomplished during the past decade of new awareness concerning the potential mismatch of child language aid school language.

As is so often the case, the problem born in the classroom took several years to find nourishment from the disciplines which could help feed it (psychology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology). And, until proper attention could be given, several misdirections were inevitably taken. It is difficult to remember exactly what was considered canon just a few years ago. The myths linger on in the minds of some people but the wide acceptance of deficit, non-verbality, small vocabulary, parental isolation, noisy environment and squalid living have been at least somewhat neutralized. Minority children's language was considered unsystematic and haphazard and they were thought to reflect cognitive deficits in the failure of their oral language to match that of their middle class teachers. If ever there was a field in need of research, it was this one.

Despite all the attacks and counter-attacks that have grown out of the study of vernacular English, a number of useful and important developments have taken place. One impact has been on the field of linguistics itself. Today variability in language analysis has become a crucial issue thanks at least partially, to the influence brought about by the study of vernacular English. Static grammars are suddenly out of favor, even among generative linguists, many of whom feel that syntax cannot be studied apart from its larger semantic context. In one sense, the study of vernacular English has had a significant impact on the development of the education of linguists.

Equally interesting is that this wedge in the crack has begun to open the door toward the solution of a number of broader educational problems which have to do with linguistic and cultural variability in a much larger context than that suggested by the Vernacular English used by minorities. The discovery that minorities have a wide repertoire of language uses is finally beginning to be seen for what it is--a distinct linguistic advantage. Ignoring for a moment the politics of education which might argue for eradicating or modifying one or more styles or for building new ones, the simple fact of the existence of such a range of styles is beginning to look like a good and useful thing. The binary, right-wrong classroom paradigm is subject to question. People do use language in a number of contexts, for a number of purposes, to a number of different people. Variation in language can be seen to be the fantastically complex tool with which degrees of subtlety can be effected, tone can be manipulated and poetry can be produced. A few years ago we seem to have wanted to talk and write alike. Today even the most pessimistic observer will have to admit that the scene is gradually changing. The study of vernacular English

has helped bring about this slowly evolving change and that even though we are only into the early stages of it, we might not even be this far unless such studies have been made.

3.0 Needed Research in the Mismatch of Child Language and School Language

Part of the problem in assessing the mismatch of child language and school language stems from the fact that the research has been only partially accomplished. However perceptive it may have seemed to study vernacular English a decade ago the linguistic analyses which grew out of such studies suffered from a common malady.

3.1 The Need for Expanded Linguistic Focus

Careful investigations of minority speech in New York, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and other places revealed useful patterns and systemiticity. What was lacking, however, was the touchstone for comparison. We ended up knowing a great deal about variable rules for vernacular English but little about the same rule for middle-class speech. We learned about frequency distributions for vernacular Black English speakers but little or nothing about what such distributions compare with among standard English speakers, regardless of race.

3.2 Studying-Up

Linguists historically have studied the speech of individuals, the speech of areas (regional dialects) and the speech of large social groups (social dialects) but little or no attention has been given to the discourse of

institutions or occupations (what is it like to talk like a lawyer?). Laura Nader has recently observed that anthropologists would do well to stop examining only the more exotic cultures of the world and "study up" (not down) in their own society: ". . . there is a certain urgency to the kind of anthropology that is concerned with power. . ., for the quality of life and our lives themselves may depend upon the extent to which citizens understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures."[16] If we are to learn anything useful about what goes wrong in the communication exchange between doctor and patient, we can certainly benefit from examining the speech of both participants in the exchange. Recent research in that very topic in fact, has revealed that the major problem in such communication resides in the physician, not just the patient.[17]

Much of the focus for the study of the mismatch of child language and school language in the past was only on one end of the continuum. A great deal of effort went into the study of vernacular spoken language and practically no attention was given to main-stream spoken language or to the teacher/parent/adult variety of language. It was as though mainstream children and adults were assumed to speak in a way which was opposite to that of the vernacular speakers. It has only recently become apparent that it might well prove useful to study how effective speakers speak effectively and how they acquire this thing called effectiveness.

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[16] Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist-Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." in Dell Hymes (ed.) Reinventing Anthropology. New York: Random House, 1969.

[17] Roger W. Shuy, "Communications Problems in the Cross-Cultural Medical Interview", Papers of the Second Annual Conferences on Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology, (ed. Paul D. Mozley), Key Biscayne, Florida 1974.

3.3 Studying Effective Language Use

Social, legislative and judicial pressures are making questions of this type c
this type crucial in the education of children from homes and communities where English is not the only dominant language. Experiences growing out of the Lau vs. Nichols Supreme Court decision, the Aspira Consent Decree in New York City and the various Bilingual education bills has revealed a basic gap in the knowledge base for educational programming. There is no doubt that legislative and judicial action has effectively provided momentum for education to be more responsive to the needs of children who are linguistically and culturally different from the mainstream. However, the momentum requires educational technology that is yet to be developed.

For example, the Aspira Consent Decree requires that the placement of children in educational programs using English or Spanish as the medium of instruction be determined by their ability to "effectively participate" in the instruction. This legislation preceeds the technology upon which it can be based by a wide mark. No assessment instruments are available which purport to test this ability. There is a general consensus among second language specialists that tests of grammar and phonology are not accurate predictors of effective participation and that functional language competence is far more crucial. That is, to say that a child is effectively participating in a class room when he can seek clarification or get a turn seems much more crucial than when he can distinguish phonologically between shoes and choose or when he can make proper use of past tense markers. To develop assessment instruments capable of testing what needs to be tested, there must be available an inventory of the functional language competence demanded in the educational setting at the various age/grade levels.

3.4 Studying Functional Language Competence

Functional language competence is the underlying knowledge that people have that allows them to use their language to make utterances in order to accomplish goals and to understand the utterances of others in terms of their goals. It includes a knowledge of what kinds of goals language can accomplish (the functions of language) and what are permissible utterances to accomplish each function (language strategies). The following figure displays a small sample of the functions, strategies, and utterances that have been noticed for adult English speakers:

FUNCTION	STRATEGY	UTTERANCE
Giving an order	Performative	I hereby order you to come home.
	Direct Imperative	Give Jane some food
	Wh- imperative	Won't you please buy me some candy?
	Statement	Mr. Jones, I need some more paper.
Promising	Performative	I hereby promise you that I will be home by eleven.
Promising	Future Statement	I'll be home by eleven.
	Conditional Statement	If you give me a dollar, I'll be home by eleven.
	Questions	Will you let me take care of my own affairs?

FIGURE 2

This figure is in no way complete. There are many more functions, many other strategies for each function and, of course, many other utterances which could be used for each strategy. More important, the figure is incomplete in that the context of each utterance needs to be specified to insure that the utterance is permissible to accomplish the function. For example, the sentence, "If you give me a dollar, I'll be home by eleven" is a promise only if the context shows that the addressee desires that the speaker come home at that time, and if the speaker believes that a dollar is valuable incentive. It could also be a threat if the context shows that the addressee desires the speaker to stay away and the speaker either considers receiving money to be inappropriate or considers a dollar to be too little money to be an incentive.

Functional language competence also accounts for knowing what utterances cannot do. In English, the statement "you are a frog", does not work to turn the addressee into a frog. In the U.S., at least, uttering the words "I divorce you" does not constitute the completion of divorce proceedings but "I christen you John" does work to christen a child. Likewise if a teacher tells a student, "you have one minute to get over here," the utterance can act as an order but if the student says the same thing to the teacher such a meaning is, at best, far fetched.

This very sketchy and incomplete discussion of some aspects of functional language competence shows that a speaker's underlying knowledge must be extensive and complex. In the literature of linguistics, sociolinguistics and philosophy three other terms are also used to refer to functional language competence: communicative competence, pragmatics of natural language and speech act competence. All who have studied this phenomenon agree that language users

cannot possibly learn and store in memory all of the complexities of functions, strategies and utterances as item lists any more than they can store phonological or grammatical language as item lists. This knowledge must be learned and stored according to organizational principles. These principles may be considered constitutive rules which account for the successes and failures in the utterances meant as promises, for example, but they also separate promises from orders, requests for information, etc. In a similar manner, the constitutive rules of football not only account for the successes or failures of particular plays but also account for football and not baseball or soccer.

In terms of the mismatch between child language and school language, a great deal needs to be learned about functional language. It is my opinion that mismatches in this area offer considerably greater interference than anything researched in the past. We have ample evidence that phonological interference is not very important. Grammatical interference seems to be possibly important, but no where nearly as much so as functional language interference.

3.5 Functional Language In the Reading Classroom

Functional language competence is relevant to beginning reading instruction in three ways: first, in terms of teacher education; second, in terms of the fit between the child's developing functional language competence and the school's curricula and materials; and third, in terms of the current issues of the education of culturally and linguistically different children.

3.5.1 Teacher Education

To say that more emphasis should be placed on training teachers about how language works in order that they can better understand, appreciate and diagnose problems in their students is a gross understatement. It has been shown in various studies in the past that teachers are not trained adequately to diagnose relevant student problems related to language.[18] Reading teachers, in particular suffer from being given only information on methods of teaching reading without being given the knowledge of linguistics which will enable them to diagnose a pronunciation problem from a grammatical miscue, the knowledge of psychology which will enable them to differentiate and evaluate the gestalt of reading from its component parts, and the knowledge of the cultural aspects of reading which will enable them to distinguish reading problems from sex-role fulfillment or group membership pressures.

Applications of knowledge of how language functions work can enable a teacher to interpret apparent misreadings appropriately. The most prominent occasions in which such diagnoses might be made concern comprehension questions. If teacher requests are made, for example, with strategies which have not yet been acquired, confusion is apt to result. The meaning of the teacher's utterance regardless of how well intentioned it might be, must be expressed in terms of both the semantic and pragmatic (functional) meaning system of the child. There is insufficient material provided to teachers regarding any kind

[18] R. Shuy, "Teacher Training and Urban Language Problems" in R. Fasold and R. Shuy (eds) Teaching Standard English in the Inner City. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1970, pp. 120-141.

of language competence and problems in the educational setting arise from a failure to apply information about a teacher's and a child's functional language competence. The following incident is illustrative of this lack of information. Other resource information is inappropriately applied due in part to this gap in the teacher's resources. The scenario was observed during an outside free play activity among four year olds:

> Three boys are in a fairly separate area of the play yard with a teacher observing the action. The first child had brought a very nice glider to school. The rule is that when toys are brought from home they must be shared or left in the child's cubbyhole. The first and the second child are playing freely with the glider. The third child is not playing. Finally the third child sees the glider and goes to retrieve it. The first child runs faster and picks it up quickly. The following conversation ensues:
>
> Third Child: I want a turn. Can I have a turn? I want a turn Let me have a turn.
>
> First Child: Look, I'd let you have a turn but you dropped it. You'll break it.
>
> Third Child: If you let me have a turn, I'll (pause) I'll be your friend.
>
> First Child: I don't need you to be my friend.
>
> Intonation: I don't need you to be my frie e end.

The teacher then enters the conversation and addresses the first child by name, talking to him about everyone needing friends, and about sharing toys. After about five minutes of discussion of these values, she gives him the option of returning the toy to his cubby or letting the third child play with it after the first child tells him some rules about it. Then the following:

> First Child: Say you won't drop it and break it.
>
> Third Child: I won't drop it. I won't break it.

The teacher and the observer discussed the incident later. From the teacher's actions and discussion it became clear that she didn't notice that the third child had experienced and exhibited a problem in functional language competence. He was trying to make a promise using a conditional statement strategy and was unable to carry it off successfully. The first child located the problem - a promise has to involve what the addressee perceives as valuable and in this case the general childhood value of having friends was not specific enough. What the first child "needed" was to hear in the promise that the third child wouldn't drop and break the glider. Instead of being rewarded for attempting to assist his peer in developing functional language competence the child was rebulked for global socialization offenses, i.e., not sharing, being exclusive in friendships. What the third child needed was some assistance in developing a new strategy for making promises, instead he was allowed to ignore this need and to play with the glider anyway. What the teacher needed was some information about the language functions, strategies, expected developmental sequences, and teacher strategies that foster development of functional language competence. The teacher also would have benefited from applicational assistance: some practice observing children's language behavior, hypothesizing on the causes of certain behavior, and planning, implementing and evaluating teacher strategies that capitalize on those aspects of the educational setting that encourage the development of functional language competence.

It is not surprising that teachers are not well aware of the significance of developing language functions. They are scarcely aware even of the child's developing phonology and grammar. Furthermore, this area of study has only recently became visible even to linguists and the research is only now under way.

It appears that language functions, unlike phonology and grammar, are developmental almost throughout one's life. Few adults, for example, ever become proficient at the language function of condoling. For the sake of survival, children learn how to interrupt appropriately rather early. They learn that interruption is complex and often asymetrical (teachers can interrupt children rather blatantly but children must develop sophisticated strategies for interrupting teachers). One also learns how to avoid being interrupted, how to get or avoid a turn in talking, how to refuse, how to clarify, how to obfuscate with dignity (see especially the Watergate transcripts). What may be considered rudeness may be only an imperfectly developed sense of interruption skills. It would seem critical for teachers to be able to distinguish between these matters.

3.5.2 Fit Between Functional Language Competence and School Curricula and Materials

Although baseline normative data on functional language acquisition still do not exist, some of the ways in which curricula and materials can conflict or support the development can be noted. The material of many reading primers that use a playground for a setting while having a range of ages and statuses in their characters often present language which is undifferentiated for these distinctions. There is an obvious effort to have the setting relate to the actual elements in the child's universe but the questions asked by the characters, the requests made, the orders given do not relate to the actual elements in

the child's universe but the question asked by the characters, the requests made, the orders given do not relate to the actual functional language rules related to politeness and relative status of the addressee and the speaker. Such samples of language give little assistance to the child developing these distinctions and are potentially in conflict with his development.

Likewise curricula can also conflict with functional language development. For younger children, a major curriculum objective is for the children to learn cooperative social organization. In an incident in which two children had agreed upon a turn taking arrangement in play, one teacher perceived the resulting argument, actually caused by violation in turn taking, as the unwillingness of one child to share. This incident illustrates that the cooperative social organization, which was the goal of both the curriculum and the children's language in conflict, can be easily misconstrued or narrowly defined.

3.5.3 Culturally Specific Application

Much about functional language appears to be very culture specific. What remains to be researched are specifics concerning the functional language competence necessary for effective interaction in an educational setting and a comparison of the realization of such competence across cultures. What appears to American teachers to be defiance in Vietnamese refugee children (arms folded in front of them) is actually a stance of submissiveness in that culture. We need to know what functional language performance by children is judged necessary or desireable by teachers even though it may not be necessary for effective interaction. We need to obtain data on the differences in functional

language competence across cultures and languages and what the demands of the school setting are on such functions. Such research has hardly begun but it offers a much richer source of explanatory power concerning the mismatch of child language and school language than has heretofor been conceived.

4.0 Needed Research in the Mismatch of Child Language and Learning Styles

To this point it has been assumed that the mismatch of child language and school language is a critical factor in identifying and remediating much of what is currently called reading failure. It has been asserted that phonological mismatch is probably not important, that grammatical mismatch is slightly more so (but such a claim is still unsupported by research) so (but such a claim is still unsupported by research) and that functional mismatch is probably the most crucial of all. Such assumptions are based on the complex interaction of productive and receptive language on the part of student, teacher and materials.

Since reading is a language processing operation, a theory of reading should account for language in the many ways it reveals itself developmentally. In at least one sense of the term, reading can be viewed in a time-frame continuum in which early skills are developed, paradoxically, only to be abandoned as soon as possible for advanced cognitive processes. Reading offers a rather clear example of a mixture of such early behavioral skills, later cognitive strategies and a potential for cultural interpretation and individual learning style. Elsewhere I have noted the acquisitional sequence of the language accesses in reading.[20]

[20] R. Shuy, "Pragmatics: Still Another Contribution of Linguistics to Reading" in Language and Reading (ed. Sandra Smiley and John Towner) Sixth Western Symposium on Learning, Bellingham: Western Washington State College, 1975.

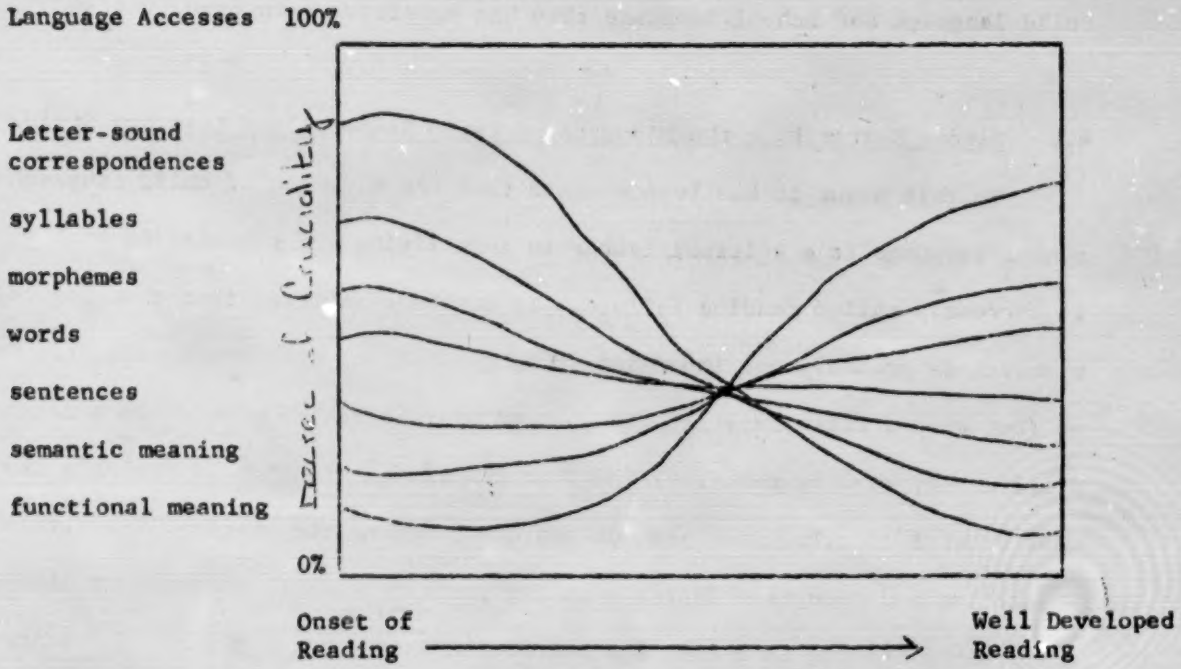

FIGURE 3

This figure can be thought to represent a theory if reading in which the various language accesses to reading (letter-sound correspondence, syllables, etc.) are of different cruciality to the process of learning to read at different stages in the acquisitional process. That is, letter-sound correspondence seems to be of high cruciality at the onset of reading (as a rather behavioral "starting" skill) but grows less critical to a given reader as he becomes more and more proficient. Good readers do not read letter by letter; they process by larger and larger units, up to and including contextual meaning units. Such a theory argues for moving immediately toward

meaning in reading and for all learning to take place in realistic meaning contexts (no study of letters in isolation from meaning units). There has been some disagreement among reputable scholars on exactly how this movement toward meaning and realistic meaning context is to be carried out. Some argue that it is better to start to read whole sentences, for meaning is thought to be most significant at the syntactic level. I have argued that meaning exists as far down as the morpheme level and although I would agree that it is important to develop materials which are found in realistic language contexts, I disagree with those who would totally abandon decoding. Learning theory has long held that different kinds of learning can take place at different stages of learning. Thus behavioral, skill-focused learning can be adequate in the early stages of reading but should be replaced as soon as possible by more cognitive strategies (those involving meaning). For some critics, this means sentences. I would argue that for the typical cooperative child who will accept the fact that certain dull or odd things must be done in order to get to later more interesting things, almost any reading approach can be successful. Some children may be ready to accept such behavioral (letter-sound type) instruction earlier or later than others. Some sort of diagnostic instrument should be able to predict who such children are. It seems likely that one type of prediction will be based on the child's personality more than on the reading tasks or on the language accesses themselves.

Relatively little is known about learning style, despite the rather large amount of attention given it in education. We know (or think we know) some things about cultural learning styles (Navajos sit in circles, etc.) but relatively little about individual non-socially determined styles. Some

research exists on perceptual styles and personal experience shows me that, in judging a work of art, I see shape before color or detail. It would seem reasonable that such perceptual plugging-in might be relevant here as well. Figure 3, which outlines seven language accesses to reading (letter-sound correspondence, syllables, morphemes, words, sentences, semantics and functions), may be explored for evidences of learning style. It is clear that some children have learned to read even though only letter-sound correspondences (often phonics) materials are placed before them. Likewise, some children have been known to learn to read when only look-say (word) materials are used. Interestingly enough, children who are taught using only the look-say, whole word approach even have been known to develop letter-sound correspondence abilities in the classroom (otherwise, they might never have learned to spell well).

Although a good main-line reading program has the obligation to provide multi-language accesses to its general or normal audience, we have no reason to believe that all children will need all the accesses or techniques equally or in the same proportion presented in the teacher's manual or, for that matter, at all. It would seem reasonable to me, for example, that one child's learning style might involve a combination of letter-sound correspondence and syntax, completely ignoring the whole word and syllable accesses. Other children may have similarly idiosyncratic learning styles. This does not mean that main line program is in error for presenting it all. What this suggests, instead, is that it would be efficient if we could figure out what amounts of the language accesses best suit the learning styles of each child.

In order to do this efficiently, it is first necessary to clarify what we mean by efficiency. What I mean by efficiency is getting to the righthand

side of figure 3 as soon and as well as possible. This means that I am not very concerned that the child who gets there maintains his ability to hold in focus the component skills which get him there. I regard letter-sound correspondence, syllables, morphemes, and, to a certain extent, words as component skills in the gestalt of reading for meaning via sentences, paragraphs, pages or books. As such, they are beginning skills, primarily useful as stages in the acquisition of the <u>real</u> skill. The <u>real</u> skill of reading involves getting various kinds of meaning from the printed page.

It is reasonable to believe, for example, that one particular child's representation of Figure 1 might look like this:

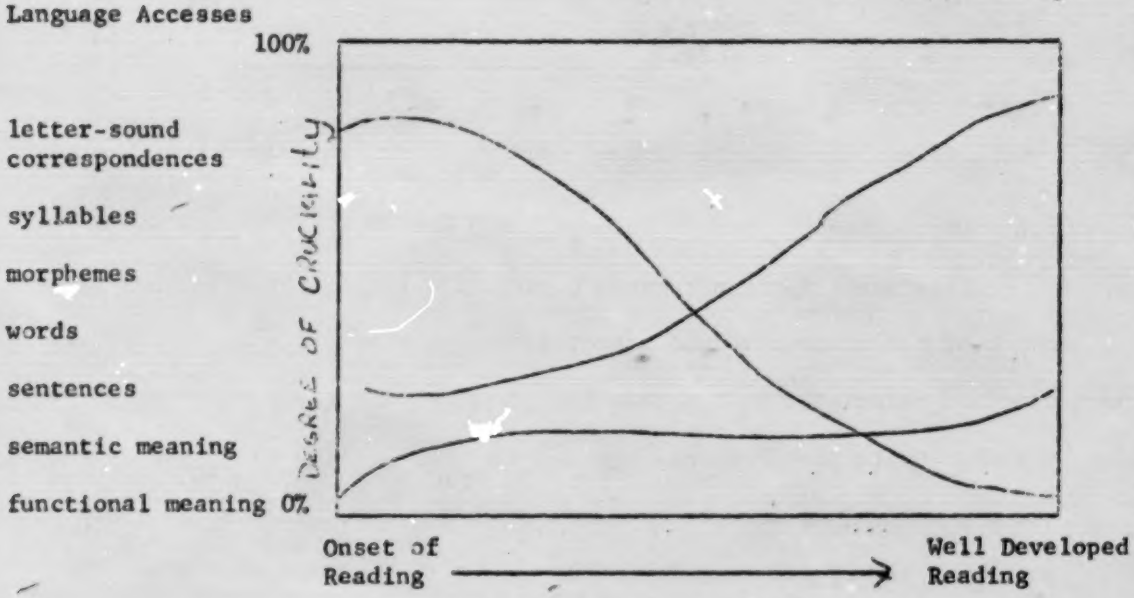

FIGURE 4

Another child's language access configuration might look like this:

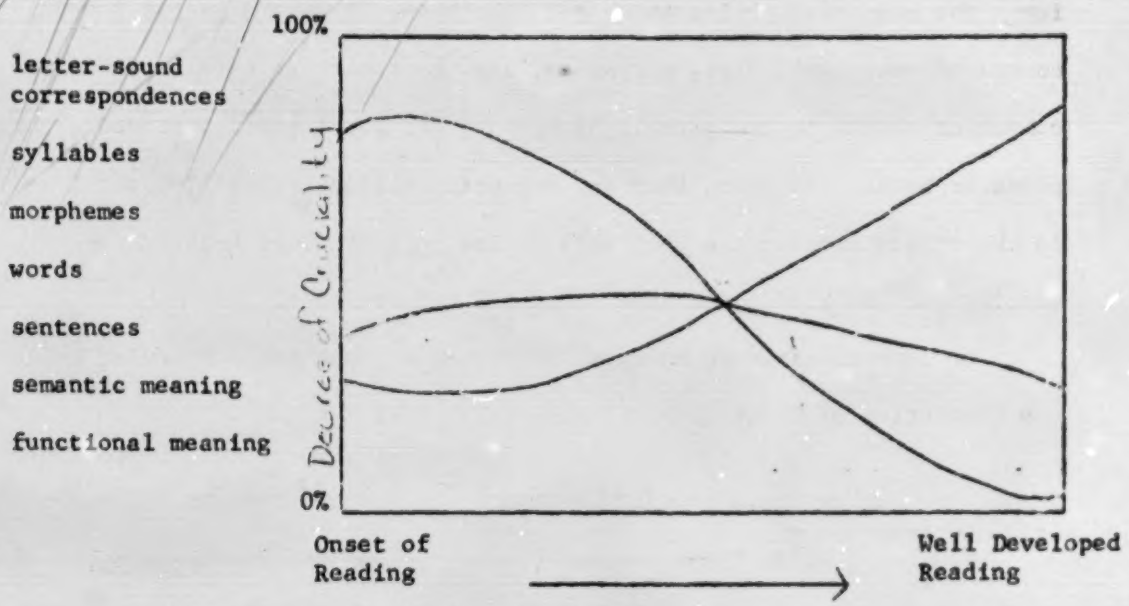

FIGURE 5

5.0 Conclusion

This paper first attempted to describe the past assumptions about the mismatch of child language and school language, especially as they relate to the distance principle, to language interference, and to various treatment hypotheses. Next, past research was assessed, especially dealing with phonological and grammatical mismatches of language in reading. The major thrust of the paper was to suggest that recent developments in linguistic theory and research have opened the area of language functions for investigation and that this area is certainly the most promising of all for determining exact causes for reading

difficulty and failure. Finally, it was suggested that a language based theory of reading can provide the framework for discovering what might be at least one dimension of the elusive search for learning styles. If individualization is to mean anything beyond motivation and attitude, certain hope is offered by such an analysis.